AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Previously Presented) A surgical retractor blade for attaching to a drive mechanism, said retractor blade comprising a body having a first end, a second end, a channel adapted to engage one side of an incision in a patient, said first end having a first cavity adapted to receive a support member extending from said drive mechanism, and a second cavity adapted to receive a second support member extending from said drive mechanism.

2. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 1 wherein said channel is adapted to receive and incised sternum.

3. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 1 wherein said first cavity is a blind hole having a predetermined depth from said first end.

4. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 3 wherein said blind hole is substantially cylindrical.

5. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 3 wherein said depth is at least about 1.125 inches long.

6. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 1 wherein said first cavity becomes progressively smaller in a direction away from said first end.

7. (Canceled)

8. (Canceled)

9. (Previously Presented) A detachable surgical retractor blade for attaching to a drive mechanism, said retractor blade comprising a body having a first end, a second end, a channel adapted to engage one side of an incision in a patient, and a rail extending along at least a portion of said body, wherein said rail has a top portion and a bottom portion, said bottom portion having a narrowed region

adjacent said top portion forming first and second tabs on said top portion; and wherein said retractor blade is detachable from the drive mechanism even when said retractor blade is applying force through said channel to one side of the incision..

10. (Canceled)

11. (Previously Presented) A surgical retractor blade, said retractor blade comprising a body having a first end adapted to attach to a separate, complete driving mechanism, a second end, a channel adapted to engage one side of an incision in a patient, a rail extending along at least a portion of said body, and a plurality of open slots for receiving a suture therein, wherein said open slots have an internal wall and a suture locking member having a fixed end and a free end, said free end engaging said internal wall so as to clamp a suture placed between said free end and said internal wall.

12. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 11 wherein said suture locking member is substantially rigid and pivots about said fixed end.

13. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 12 further comprising a spring member biased against said suture locking member to forcibly urge said free end towards said internal wall.

14. (Previously Presented) A surgical retractor blade for attaching to a drive mechanism, said retractor blade comprising a body having a first end, a second end, a channel adapted to engage one side of an incision in a patient, a rail extending along at least a portion of said body, and a plurality of open slots for receiving a suture therein, wherein at least one of said open slots have a first slot section which bifurcates into a second slot section and a third slot section.

15. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor blade of claim 14, wherein each of said second and third slot sections have an internal wall and a suture locking member having a fixed end and a free end, said free end engaging said internal wall so as to clamp a suture placed between said free end and said internal wall.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Previously Presented) A surgical retractor blade for attaching to a drive mechanism, said retractor blade comprising a body having a first end, a second end, a channel adapted to engage one side of an incision in a patient, and a rail extending along at least a portion of said body, wherein said first end has a cavity adapted to receive a support member extending from said drive mechanism.

18. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 17 wherein said cavity is a tapered hole.

19. (Original) The surgical retractor blade of claim 18 further comprising a flexible polymeric flap adapted to flexibly engage soft tissue surrounding said incision.

20. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor blade of claim 1, wherein said body comprises a polymer.

21. (Canceled)

22. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor of claim 9, wherein said body comprises a polymer.

23. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor blade of claim 11, wherein said body comprises a polymer.

24. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor blade of claim 14, wherein said body comprises a polymer.

25. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor blade of claim 17, wherein said body comprises a polymer.

26 (Previously Presented) A surgical retractor blade for attaching to a drive mechanism, said retractor blade comprising a body having a first end, a second end, a channel adapted to engage one side of an incision in a patient, a rail extending along at least a portion of said body, and a plurality of open slots for receiving a suture therein, wherein said open slots have an internal wall and a suture locking member having a fixed end and a free end, said free end engaging said internal wall so as to clamp a

suture placed between said free end and said internal wall, wherein said suture locking member is substantially rigid and pivots about said fixed end.

27. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor blade of claim 26, further comprising a spring member biased against said suture locking member to forcibly urge said free end towards said internal wall.

28. (Canceled)

29. (Canceled)

30. (Canceled)

31. (Canceled)

32. (New) A surgical retractor blade comprising an elongated body having a first end adapted to be releasably attached to a retractor driving mechanism and a second end, wherein said first end comprises a first opening extending into said body, said first opening configured for receiving an extension from the retractor driving mechanism, and a second opening extending from said first end into said body, said second opening configured for receiving a second extension from the retractor driving mechanism.

33. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 32, further comprising a locking mechanism to lock said blade to said retractor mechanism when in a locked orientation, and to unlock said blade from said retractor mechanism when in an unlocked orientation.

34. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 32, wherein said first opening is tapered to become progressively smaller in a direction away from said first end.

35. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 33, wherein said extension that said first opening is configured for receiving includes a notch, and wherein said locking mechanism comprises a latch member for engaging the notch.

36. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 32, wherein said second opening is tapered to become progressively smaller in a direction away from said first end.

37. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 32, further comprising a rail extending along at least a portion of said retractor blade.

39. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 37, wherein said rail comprises a top portion and a bottom portion, said bottom portion having a narrowed region adjacent said top portion, forming first and second tabs on said top portion.

40. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 37, wherein said rail is curved along its length.

41. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 32, further comprising a plurality of open slots for receiving and securing a suture therein.

42. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 37, further comprising a plurality of open slots formed in said rail for receiving and securing a suture therein.

43. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 32, further comprising a flexible flap adapted to flexibly engage soft tissue surrounding the incision.

44. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 32, wherein said body comprises polymeric material.

45. (New) A surgical retractor blade comprising an elongated body having a first end, a second end, a channel adapted to engage one side of an incision in a patient, a rail extending along at least a portion of said elongated body, and a plurality of open slots formed in said rail for receiving a suture therein, wherein said first end is adapted to be releasably attached to a retractor drive mechanism.

46. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 45, wherein at least one of said open slots comprises a first slot section which bifurcates into a second slot section and a third slot section.

47. (New) The surgical retractor blade of claim 46, wherein each of said second and third slot sections have an internal wall and a suture locking member having a fixed end and a free end, said free end engaging said internal wall so as to clamp a suture placed in between said free end and said internal wall.

48. (New) A surgical retractor system for creating an opening through an incision in a patient, said system comprising:

a drive mechanism having a main body and first and second extensions extending from said main body, said first extension being movable relative to said second extension; and

first and second retractor blades releasably attached to said first and second extensions, respectively.

49. (New) The surgical retractor system of claim 48, wherein each of said first and second retractor blades comprises an elongated body having a first end and a second end, said first end having an opening to receive a respective one of said first and second extensions.